



2nd Week Ordinary Time: 16/17 January 2022

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“We have come to know and to believe in the love that God has for us.”

Some years ago now there was an outcry around Christmas time when Pope Benedict XVI said that the ox and the donkey - regular features around the manger – are latter day inventions, and are nowhere to be seen in the Gospels. People who normally go quietly after Mass, were asking had I heard this: it came as a bit of a shock. The context was Pope Benedict writing on the life of Christ and speaking about the Infancy narratives. The crib, a wonderful “real-life” creation by St. Francis to remind people of the wonder and Love of God the Father sending His Son as a little child has grown over the years. Pope Benedict said that references to the ox and the donkey in other parts of the Bible may have inspired Christians to include them in their nativity scenes. Personally, I think that the reality was people see the ox and the donkey around the farm and before long they had them in the manger scene too.

However, the Pope made people think. In Italy the Crib, the manger scene, has grown enormously. I wouldn’t be surprised if the odd car was not seen passing by in some of the wonderful inventions!

I was reminded of this when Pope Francis caused some animated discussion the last week or so when he entered into the field of “adoption” and “fostering” on the occasion of speaking about St. Joseph and the importance of his role in the brining up of Jesus. Our teaching about marriage and family is very much inspired by the Scripture too, as you would expect, and especially the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Like Benedict before him, Francis wants to make people think about where we have got to now, particularly when people want the comforts of marriage, but no family. And he dared to say some would prefer to centre all their love on cats and dogs rather than on the wonderful vocation of bringing children into the world, and the beauty of adoption and fostering too. He didn’t say we shouldn’t have cats and dogs, nor did he show lack of appreciation of how much happiness animals have brought people during lockdown.

In many places in Scripture, right from the Book of Genesis, human beings share the lordship of creation with the Creator, and are called by God to marriage and family. This week as we read from the first book of Samuel at daily Mass, we were reminded of the importance of family as Hannah was unable to conceive; the birth of Samuel was an answer to prayer!

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

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The Second Sunday of Ordinary Time moves on from the Baptism of Jesus to his first miracle, the changing of the jars of water into wine at the Wedding Feast in Cana. To me it is no surprise that this was the first of the signs of who Jesus was, recorded by St. John.

To run out of wine at the wedding feast in the time of Our Lord would have been the greatest embarrassment. The couple would have been distraught. The miracle worked by Jesus is a sign for St. John (the only one of the Gospel writers who records this event) of who Jesus is: how he can change our lives, and his love and care for us.

There are times when joy in life runs out, like the wine does here; it may be unemployment, sadness, disappointment, rejection, breakdown of relationship. This miracle reminds us to turn to Jesus whose healing touch can restore us; whose teaching on the presence of the cross that leads to new life can reassure us. And, of course, it is in the bread and wine of the Eucharist that we are renewed by the presence of the Lord with us and in us.

Marriage and wedding feasts are metaphors used to describe God's salvation and the Kingdom of God. The lavish response to a simple human need is a vision for us of the abundance of God's Kingdom. As St. John writes elsewhere (and it is the Communion Antiphon for the second Sunday)

"We have come to know and to believe in the love that God has for us." (1 John 4:16).

Finally, this miracle at Cana reminds us not only of the special place marriage and family has in Church life and teaching, but also of the particular part Mary, the Mother of Jesus, plays in our lives as Christians. It was Mary who pointed Jesus to the need of this young couple at their wedding feast. She is the one to whom we can turn with confidence, knowing she has the heart of a mother in all our needs. John who records this miracle, was the one to whom Jesus said on the Cross "Behold your Mother" referring to Mary who stood there too. And to Mary "Woman, behold your Son." (John 19:25-27).

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